



555 Capitol Mall, Suite 300
Sacramento, California 95814
Call toll free: 1-866-356-5217
Fax: 916-319-9295
Email: votersfirstact@auditor.ca.gov

**California Bureau of State Audits
MEMORANDUM**

To: Applicant Review Panel Members Mary Camacho, Kerri Spano, and Nasir Ahmadi
Applicant Review Panel Counsel Stephanie Ramirez-Ridgeway

From: Steven Benito Russo, Chief of Investigations

Subject: Staff Report on the Bureau's activities in support of the panel, particularly, gathering information concerning applicants

Date: September 21, 2010

Introduction

Since the meeting of the Applicant Review Panel on August 6, 2010, Bureau staff has been continuing to provide support to the Panel as outlined in my report of June 11, 2010. Most significantly during the period since the August 6 meeting, staff has been gathering information about the 120 applicants chosen to participate in an interview by the Panel and presenting that information in reports to the Panel that have been posted on the Wedrawthelines website along with the applicants' application materials. The purpose of the information-gathering process has been both to confirm the information presented in the applicants' application materials and to acquire additional information regarding the applicants – positive and negative – that may be significant to the Panel in determining who should be selected as the 60 finalists. In doing this, we attempted to be as thorough as possible, but obviously could only do as much as resources permitted.

The process we undertook to gather information consisted of four key components: (1) performing a routine search for information about every applicant from an established list of public and private sources; (2) contacting at least one of the persons who wrote a letter of recommendation concerning each applicant to confirm the information the person provided in the letter and obtain any additional information about the applicant that could be significant; (3) searching for information about the applicants from additional sources as seemed prudent in light of the content of each applicant's application materials; and (4) contacting each applicant to try to confirm the accuracy of the information contained in the materials and confirm the accuracy of any significant new information about the applicant that we discovered during the

information-gathering process. We then distilled the information we gathered into what are obviously rather brief reports, as we were very conscious of the fact that with 120 applicants in the group being interviewed, the Panel's available time to read our reports was very limited.

Regarding the first component of the process – the routine search for information from public and private sources, I have attached to this memorandum a list of those sources. Our choice of these particular information sources was largely driven by our need to uncover information from sources that could best reveal to us whether an applicant has a conflict of interest as defined by the Voters FIRST Act, such as by having been a registered lobbyist within the past ten years. However, we also included sources that would be useful for obtaining general information about the applicants that could be significant to the Panel in evaluating their qualifications.

Concerning the second component of the fact-gathering process – contacting at least one letter of recommendation writer for each applicant, we felt this was important to do in order to make sure that applicants hadn't written letters on their own behalf, to test whether the letter writers really seemed to know what they were talking about in their letters, and just to make contact with a real, living, breathing person who could offer us insights into the applicant.

As for the third component of the fact-gathering process – contacting additional sources of information not contacted as part of our routine search for information -- this was the most creative part of the process for us, and the part that was entirely directed by where we were led by the other two components of the process. For some applicants whose stated qualifications were pretty straight-forward and could be confirmed through the routine sources, there was very little searching of additional sources of information that needed to be done. However, for certain applicants, particularly those who we suspected of having a conflict of interest arising from an activity that occurred several years ago, or who had a more colorful background that might indicate a lack of impartiality or appreciation for diversity, this "customized" search for information was rather extensive.

The fourth component of the process – speaking with each of the applicants – was an essential part of trying to ensure the accuracy of the application materials and of the information that we uncovered through our information gathering. We reviewed with the applicants the content of their application materials to try to ensure that all of the required information was included and that we correctly understood what was stated in the materials. We also asked additional questions of applicants to help us follow up on what was stated in their application materials and to try to get a better sense of them as people. Most importantly, if we discovered through our information gathering some particularly significant piece of information about an applicant that might indicate a conflict of interest or doubtful qualifications to serve as a member of the Commission, we confronted the applicant with the information and asked him or her to provide a response and/or direct us to some source of further information.

We believe that our fact-gathering process has been a successful process, and we hope that you have found our reports helpful.

Sources Consulted During Routine Information Search

Google for information about applicants and their family members (using names [including variations {e.g., Robert, Bob, etc.} and known nicknames], addresses, educational institutions, current employer, former employers, organizations of involvement, authors of letters of recommendation and authors of public comments, etc.).

Cal-Access for information about electoral candidates, campaign contributions, and lobbying.

The website for the Federal Elections Commission for information about campaign contributions and lobbying.

Opensecrets.org, Huffingtonpost.com, newsmeat.com, and/or campaignmoney.com for campaign contributions.

Lexis-Nexis for legal information (e.g., liens, court- or case-related activity, etc.).

Political Parties for committee memberships.

Local agencies for lobbyists.

As necessary, the State Controller's Office to search for state employees.

As necessary, Pipl.com and /or websites for local newspapers for general information.

As necessary, Guidestar.com for information about charitable organizations.

As necessary, State Bar website for attorneys.

As necessary, websites for other professional licensees (e.g., Consumer Affairs for contractors, architects, CPA's, etc.; medical board; etc.).

As necessary, documents from the state library and/or state archives (e.g., information regarding appointments to state offices or positions).

As necessary, county websites for court- or case-related information.

As necessary, smartvoter.org for electoral candidates.

As necessary, websites for local governments to research local ordinances for information on elected or appointed local positions.

As necessary, UC Davis website (MELVYL), Amazon.com, and/or Googlebooks.com for publication information.

As necessary, blockshopper.com for addresses.

As necessary, Facebook, Twitter, and/or LinkedIn for social network information.